

SERVICES OFFERED BY TECHNICAL INSTITUTIONS

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INTRODUCTION

It is being realised increasingly that the engineering institutions offer the best resources which can be shared by industries for productivity improvement and growth. In a developing society like ours, where competitive claims are being made by various priorities on the limited resources of the country, high expenditure on technical education can be justified only if it is related to productivity. It is no longer possible for technical institutions to remain aloof from the industries and their well-being. They must, therefore, support and accelerate the tempo of industrial development and play a more positive role towards solving the techno-industrial problems of industries.

Undisputedly, closer bounds between institutions and industries become essential for fostering and developing an environment wherein both work with mutual goodwill and trust, without sacrificing autonomy on either side, for healthy industrial development. The need of fruitful interaction between institutions and industries has been stressed in the National Policy on Education-1986. The policy measures announced recently for promoting and strengthening small, tiny and village enterprises also call upon technical institutions, such as IIT's and selected regional and other engineering colleges, to provide the facilities needed by the industries for modernization, technology and quality upgradation, technological guidance, information and training in their respective command areas [1]. It thus becomes necessary that technical institutions adopt right strategies for

interacting with the industries. This paper discusses the need of adopting the marketing approach to achieve the results.

EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION AS A SERVICE INDUSTRY

A technical institution which provides person and equipment based consultancy, testing, R & D, training and similar facilities to industries and other agencies at a price, should be regarded as a service industry. Traditionally, by design, most of technical institutions are equipped primarily for providing trained technical manpower to industries and extending R & D, consultancy and other services to industries is considered incidental to the process of training. Perhaps, in the years to come, the priorities will have to be redefined and institutes would need gearing up to meet the expectations of the industries in particular and the society in general. The growing stress on developing means to augment institute's revenue for which it imperative that institutes adopt a professional approach in extending their services.

The institutes should make their presence as an organisation capable of providing competent technical expertise on which the industries can bank upon to overcome their techno-industrial problems. This step is fundamental as many industries have little knowledge of the kind of help that can be rendered by technical institutions. The services have to reach where they are needed. This makes it necessary to scan and start from what is required from the industries and take the programme to their doorsteps. The efforts should be focused

on the needs of the industries who are the customers of the services provided by the technical institutions. The institution should be carefully define these needs from users point of view and not from the institute point of view. Peter Drucker, one of the leading management theorists, puts the marketing view point this way. " The aim of marketing is to know and understand the customer so well that the product or service fits him and sells itself. All that is needed then is to make the product or service available "... [2]

The services provided by technical institutions are diverse, variable and intangible in contrast to the product business where the product is fairly standardised. Industry expects that the services be performed to an acceptable level of quality, at an affordable price and according to scheduled or promised times. Because several factors determine the service quality, marketing of these services require special efforts to tangibilise the intangible and to standardise the quality in the face of variability. It goes without saying that all the activities undertaken by the institute should be maintained on commercial principles and procedural time delays should be minimised.

PREPARING FOR THE CHANGE

The marketing approach calls for some structural and attitudinal changes in the system through purposeful actions.

The establishment of industry - institute interaction cells in a number of technical institutions in the country, including some polytechnics, has been a major step in the direction of reorienting the institutions to industry needs. The activities of such forums are directed at reducing the gaps existing between institute and the industries and to promote mutually beneficial interaction. The relationships sought to be established between the industries and the institution and the corresponding flows of information may be seen in Fig. 1. It is easily noticed that the industry institute interaction cell, engaged in various liaison activities and management of

information, is at the hub of service marketing activities undertaken by institutes.

Service marketing strategy requires not only the traditional external marketing efforts but also internal marketing to motivate the employees. The faculty and the supporting personnel must be encouraged to work as a team to provide customer satisfaction with everyone practising a customer orientation. Further, since it cannot be assumed that a customer is satisfied simply by providing a good technical service, actions become necessary to see that adequate enthusiasm, personal concern and skills are exhibited by service providers. Interactive marketing, which aims at creating these skills, is also required to be practised.

ACTION POINTS

The following steps are suggested to make the management of services more meaningful and productive.

- Identifying areas of strength and expertise in which the institute can offer services such as consultancy, testing, R &D, training and continuing education of industry personnel etc.
- Development of a data bank for technical information on equipment and facilities available, faculty wise expertise, industries who have been offered services already with corresponding details, sector wise list of industries and contact persons etc.
- Identification of the needs of the industries through mail questionnaire, personal visits and discussions with company officials and organising technical seminars and workshops to assess the requirements of different industry sectors. Assistance of Professional bodies, such as industries associations, chamber of commerce and productivity council, may be taken in this regard.
- Identifying industry sectors which provide opportunities for best returns, both academic and monetary, and can

be served best with the existing expertise and infrastructural facilities, thus enabling the institute to focus the interaction efforts on most gainful areas.

- Matchng services to the identified needs based on existing expertise and infrastructural facilities. Also acquiring new facilities and expertise to meet potential demand, if viable.
- Establishing a centralised coordination cell to work for simplification of procedures and minimising delays, especially when inter-departmental activities are undertaken; documenting procedures and working out rate schedules using a rational basis for pricing e.g. machine-hour and man-hour rates, number of input hours etc.; procuring relevant Indian and other standards required for testing assignments and designing proforma for reporting results; getting the test equipment calibrated from appropriate agencies periodically; identifying contact persons in the departments for assigning the work as well as its follow up for monitoring the work progress. Also, record keeping on various jobs to ensure traceability.
- Adopt a communication strategy to draw attention of the industries to the facilities and expertise available and the services offered besides creating a favourable image of the institute with the industries as well as the society. This can be done through well designed communications to industries & professional bodies and by participation in seminars, giving publicity to achievements and mailing institution's news bulletin regularly to them to highlight the interaction activities.
- Develop a system for motivating the faculty members and other staff by offering awards and compensations for their involvement in the R & D, consultancy and other industry related activities. This may be done by way of

monetary awards, appreciation certificates, linking their work with career growth such as promotions etc.

- Adopt special programmes to invite greater participation of industries in the industry institute interaction activities. Adoption of small and tiny industries, industrial associateship programme and establishment of technology information centre are suggested, as discussed in [3].

It is envisaged that the implementation of the above suggested action points would help in providing the marketing orientation to interaction activities and result in developing industry's faith and confidence in institutions as regards getting competent technical assistance.

A concious begining has to be made to project technical institutions from marketing view piont. It is easy to find that the existing service levels are incidental and casual rather than by design or through systematic efforts. Much greater cooperation and interaction is needed than what is existing today. Institutions must, therefore, work out plans of action in the best long term interest of the organisation and the industries. A look at the composition of the manufacturing sectors reveals that our industry is predominantly based upon intermediate technologies and a vast majority of the industrial units do not need the academic research at the frontiers of knowledge. More vigorous and efficient application of known technologies and expertise available at the institute is essential for improving productivity and quality of products as a common requirement with most of the industries.

CONCLUSIONS

Industries must be helped by technical institutions to become high productivity units while maintaining quality of products. The adoption of the marketing approach certainly can make significant contributions in this direction and lead to developing healthy links between the industries and the institutions for promoting industrial

development. Well being of the institution is natural outcome of the approach.

REFERENCES

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- 2] Philip Kotler, Marketing Management, Prentice Hall of India, 6th Edition, 1989.
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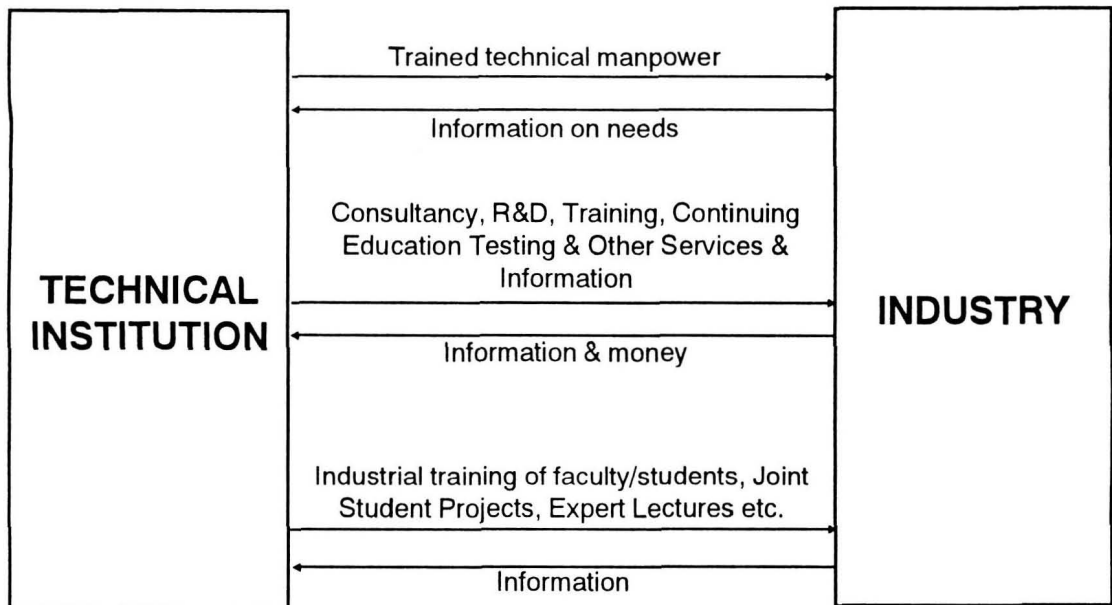


Fig. 1 Industry - Institute Marketing System
